

NARRATOR: Montoya, Robert
INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves
DATE: December 6, 2000
LOCATION: Boise, Idaho
PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter	Summary
000	Introduction.
005	Montoya offered a brief biography of his early years and of his family's lineage. He grew up in Hanover, New Mexico, and he fought fires on the Gila National Forest before he was eighteen years old. His interest in smokejumping began when some Idaho smokejumpers came to New Mexico to fight fires.
045	Montoya applied for a smokejumping position for three summers before he was accepted. He rode on a bus from New Mexico to McCall, Idaho, to be a smokejumper.
065	His first thoughts about McCall were the differences between this town and New Mexico, particularly the water. Montoya mentioned several smokejumpers from the McCall base and one particular fire in New Mexico. On this fire two smokejumpers, including Lynn Sprague, from Idaho jumped on this fire in New Mexico.
135	Before he became a smokejumper, Montoya worked as a lookout in New Mexico. He explained the various jobs he did while serving as a lookout.
165	Montoya thought the physical training to be a smokejumper was very taxing. He talked about running and doing push ups and other exercises.
190	When Montoya arrived in McCall, Idaho, he was a "ned." He explained what a "ned" is, which is the name for a rookie smokejumper. He also described the initiation or hazing that veteran smokejumpers would give to "neds." He told a story about how a few older jumpers would perform a mock funeral ceremony for rookie smokejumpers before their first jump.
240	One his first jump, Montoya main chute failed to open. He talked about what he did to release the reserve chute and what happened to him during and after landing. After he landed, the veteran smokejumpers made him do pushups and pay money to the party fund, because he did not follow procedure after landing.

- 275 Montoya talked about how hazing became too violent in the late 1960s, so the smokejumpers' bosses made them stop. He offered his opinions on why the hazing became more severe.
- 315 Smokejumpers worked hard and played hard. Montoya mentioned several bars in McCall where smokejumpers went to unwind. He claimed that the partygoers still party today, even though they are long retired. Montoya played guitar with bands at these bars and felt he was a "ringleader" of the party crowd.
- 355 Even though Montoya trained in McCall, he spent his summers at the Idaho City base. He described the jumpers at Idaho City and the strong (positive) feelings between the jumpers and the townspeople. He talked about holding Christmas in July and the fun times that event brought about. He mentioned that the closeness of the unit with the town and with each other died when the Idaho City camp moved to Boise in 1970.
- 415 Smokejumpers do carry numerous tools onto a fire. Montoya detailed the types of equipment that jumpers took to a fire. He claimed that the tools were the "basics." Montoya carried all the necessary tools while battling a blaze, and he stated that the experience of fighting fire trained him to work a fire line smarter. He also described how old smokejumpers would help new jumpers on a fire to learn about the geography and landing in a proper location.
- 500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO
- 000 Older jumpers knew the area, and, according to Montoya, they trained the young jumpers on "the do's and the don'ts."
- 015 Montoya described his numerous injuries while he served as a smokejumper. He talked about other jumpers with similar injuries. He talked about a limping contest at a smokejumping reunion.
- 035 Montoya wanted to be the best jumper, ever. So, he desired to do whatever it took, including keeping a good relationship with jumpers both current and former smokejumpers. He has kept in touch with these men and women, and he will call a former jumper just to see how they are doing. He described particular jumpers, particularly Wayne Webb, and the relationship with male and female former jumpers.
- 080 Montoya felt that smokejumpers broke the racial barrier by employing different people from different ethnic backgrounds. He also stressed his enjoyment in teaching the young jumpers and his mentors who taught him how to teach.

- 100 When he did not fight fire, Montoya worked in New Mexico in the zinc mines. He discussed working in the mine and the other miners. Montoya mentioned the things he learned from mining and smokejumping.
- 140 Montoya described the McCall camp, including the buildings and the feel of the camp. He talked about the different barracks, including which one the veterans stayed in. He offered his opinions on why some smokejumpers could not stay married.
- 185 Montoya described the Idaho City camp. He talked about the buildings and the location in Idaho City. He also talked about ground pounders who stayed in a barracks near the smokejumping barracks. Montoya said that the smokejumpers harassed the “pounders” by hitting them with pillows or spraying them with the fire extinguishers.
- 215 Some fire seasons had few fires. Montoya described some things that jumpers did when they did not fight fires. They worked on Forest Service jobs and on public service jobs for Idaho City residents.
- 260 While talking about dropping cargo out of an airplane, Montoya talked about the pilots who flew smokejumpers.
- 275 Montoya furnished his opinions about Idaho City in the 1960s. He claimed it was a wild, party town. Montoya enjoyed his time at Idaho City, and he loved the people. He has visited the town recently, and his biggest disappointment in Idaho City was that the older people in the 1960s have passed away or have grown old.
- 320 Montoya mentioned the number of bars in Idaho City. He told a story about going to the bar to give a going away party to a jumper who was drafted into the army.
- 365 In 1970 the smokejumper base moved from Idaho City to Boise. Montoya offered his opinions about this move. He felt it changed the dynamics of the unit for the worse. He did say that he made more money, because from Boise the jumpers could fly all over the West to fight fire.
- 385 The relationship between the Idaho City/Boise base and the McCall base was a rivalry, according to Montoya. He discussed the feelings between the two groups and the ways it has manifested itself into the present day.
- 425 1967, according to Montoya, was a busy fire season. He discussed some of the specific fires in the Idaho forests. He said the fires that year became big fires. That year Montoya packed parachutes and dropped cargo and smokejumpers onto fires.

465 In 1967 Montoya served mainly as a spotter. He discussed the job requirements of a spotter. The spotter served as the leader inside the airplane. He explained how the smokejumping leaders chose jumpers to become spotters.

500 **END OF SIDE TWO**
TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

000 [No introduction.] In New Mexico Montoya fought fires in the spring before he went to McCall. He became a spotter on a fire in New Mexico, and after he returned, he felt like a new man. Montoya described how he “broke in” jumpers to become spotters.

025 Montoya trained in Missoula before fighting fire in New Mexico, and he then would drive to McCall to smokejump. He talked about other busy fire season, including 1979 fire season, which Montoya called a “barnburner.”

045 By fighting fires throughout the West, Montoya met different fire fighters from all over. He told a story about seeing a jumper at a reunion that he had not seen since 1964. He also mentioned several jumpers who spoke fluent Spanish, including himself. He described one fire where several bilingual jumpers served as fire bosses and how they spoke Spanish on the two-way radio.

085 **END OF SIDE ONE**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Allen, Max
Anderson Ranch fire (1967)
Boise National Forest
Catlin, Del
Cellar, The (McCall bar)
Charter Mountain fire (1967)
Cramer, John
Crosby, Gene
Daniels, Maggie
Flossie Lake fire (1967)
Foresters' Club (McCall bar)
Gila National Forest (New Mexico)
Guy, Ed
Hanover, New Mexico
Hartman, Rudy
Hessel, Ken
Idaho City, Idaho
Indian Creek (Idaho)
Ingersoll, Ted
Johnson, Shep
Larkin, Jim
Lime Creek fire
Lindell, Jim
Martina's Lounge (Idaho City bar)
Neufeld, Elmer
O'Leary's Bar (Idaho City bar)
Payette National Forest
Peterson, Pete "Paperlegs"
Pistol Creek (Idaho)
Salmon-Challis National Forest
Salyer, Ken "Moose"
Silver City, New Mexico
Smith, Ken
Smith, Layton
Sprague, Lynn
Stover, James "Smoky"
Tate, Stan
United States Forest Service
Webb, Wayne
Williams, Jack
Yacht Club (McCall bar)

NARRATOR: Montoya, Robert
INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves
DATE: March 28, 2001
LOCATION: Boise, Idaho
PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter	Summary
000	Introduction.
010	Montoya talked about another smokejumper, Leo Cromwell, and Cromwell's first year at Idaho City. Montoya talked about a coin flip at the termination party that led to Cromwell hitting Montoya with a pie. Montoya mentioned why he picked on Cromwell; he said that he and Cromwell got along quite well.
045	For the smokejumpers that did not attend college, the forest service tried to find spring or summer jobs for them. Montoya described a party in Island Park, Idaho, during one of these early work projects. The party's host gave Montoya a parrot, and later Montoya gave the parrot away to person driving along the road.
090	Montoya discussed why smokejumpers used a coin flip to decide most of their tasks. He talked about several specific flips, including one where the loser ate a sheep dung sandwich.
145	During one summer <i>Newsweek</i> sent a photographer to the smokejumper camp in Boise. There were no fires during most of the photographer's trip. The last day a fire broke out near Atlanta, Idaho. It was a particular difficult cargo drop (the jumpers could jump out higher); the photographer suffered motion sickness and general fright. He did not take any pictures. Montoya took his camera and shot pictures of the photographer.
245	Difficult cargo drops mainly depended on the time of day, according to Montoya. He said that the most difficult drops were in heat of the day. Montoya talked about one cargo run that killed a smokejumper, Ken "Moose" Sayler and the pilot, Skip Knapp. Montoya told some stories about Sayler, who trained Montoya during his first summer as a smokejumper.
325	Montoya offered his opinions about female smokejumpers. He stated that he would have enjoyed working with women. He said that women helped smokejumpers to act like human beings.
370	Montoya worked on a lookout before he became a smokejumper. He explained some of the equipment in a lookout and how it worked. He

continued to discuss the importance of a lookout in controlling fires, particularly during Montoya's early years. He also talked about the difference between lookouts in New Mexico and Idaho.

450 During his time in New Mexico, Montoya waited out a lightning storm. He talked about how these storms could make the lookout sit and stay in his insulated chair for hours. He said that the lookouts would call each other the next day to compare how many times the lightning struck their lookouts.

500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

000 Montoya told a story about playing with swallows that flew around the lookout. Montoya would throw small scraps of papers, and the birds would catch the paper to take back to their nests. He also mentioned other animals, including bears and deer, that frequented the area around the lookout.

030 With prompting from the interviewer, Montoya detailed the differences between fighting fire in New Mexico and Idaho. He also talked about his family; their interest in fighting fires spurred Montoya to become a forest fire fighter.

065 Montoya explained why smokejumpers from around the U.S. West came to New Mexico fight fire in the late spring. He told a story about a *60 Minutes* crew that came to shoot a documentary about smokejumping; Montoya never saw it.

095 Montoya said that jumping on the Gila National Forest terrified him. He explained why jumping in New Mexico could frighten anyone. He told a story about one particular jump in New Mexico that particularly scared him and the other jumpers. Montoya described how jumping in New Mexico taught him to land in trees.

190 Volleyball, according to Montoya, "is the smokejumper's game." He described how smokejumpers played volleyball almost everyday and how the game brought out everyone's competitive nature. He said they called the game, "Animal Volleyball."

240 During his last ten years as a smokejumper, Montoya rarely jumped. He explained why he became a trainer and an administrator. In 1969 his immediate boss broke his back during a fire, so Montoya took over his responsibilities. He talked about his 150th jump, which is a milestone for smokejumper. He also told a story about another smokejumper who

transferred to the Boise base, and when this man decided to retire, Montoya helped him get to a milestone jump.

320 Montoya told the story about Ken Smith, who was Montoya's supervisor. Smith broke his back on his 199th jump, and Montoya talked about his memories of that jump. Montoya switched with Smith so he could go to a football game, and Montoya was the spotter for that jump. As Montoya returned to Idaho City, he saw a plane flying to the area where he dropped Smith and the other jumpers. The helicopter that Smith was on to return to base crashed. Montoya called that day, "The Day the Music Stopped."

465 Montoya talked about the other two jumpers that were with Ken Smith on that fateful fire. One of the jumpers, Briandt Cox, died in a plane crash a few years after he survived the helicopter crash.

500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

000 [No introduction.] Cox and his family were flying to Oregon to fish, and the plane crashed, killing all on board.

015 From the outside smokejumper do not appear to be too religious or spiritual. Montoya explained how smokejumpers are spiritual, because most are educated, taking classes in philosophy and religion. He said that smokejumpers could argue vehemently over religion.

055 Montoya talked about Stan Tate, a fellow smokejumper and a priest. Montoya described how he and Tate have conducted many funerals over the years. Tate, who Montoya nicknamed the "Ponderosa Pope," offered the eulogy, and Montoya played the guitar.

075 Montoya told the interviewer about some of the nicknames given to him. He also talked about nicknames given to other smokejumpers. He said that some nicknames were not politically correct, but that all nicknames applied to the person. He told a story about how one smokejumper found out about Montoya's family nickname, "Bobby Joe."

120 Montoya described the changes in smokejumping during his time. He said that biggest changes were in policy and the increasing acreage of individual fires. He said that on big fires today "they bring in a village." He talked about some different policy changes that occurred during his time as a smokejumper. Some of these changes contradicted themselves. Policy changes, according to Montoya, have caused many good fire fighters to leave the profession.

175 Montoya explained the importance of training among the smokejumpers.

- 200 Montoya left smokejumping when the base in Boise closed in 1979. He said the base closure made him feel terrible. He talked about what he did after he left smokejumping. It took him years before he could associate with the smokejumpers, mainly because of the pain caused by leaving.
- 235 Montoya told a story about talking to Wayne Webb before Webb died. He said that he and Webb could do the job if given the chance.
- 255 Montoya explained why smokejumpers stayed in great physical shape. He stayed at the same weight during his time as a jumper.
- 270 Montoya talked about what caused him to begin going back to the smokejumper camp and meeting with former smokejumpers. He talked about how difficult it can be when smokejumpers leave the job.
- 310 Montoya offered his opinions about the forest service abandoning the base in Boise and about the procedure involved in building the smokejumper base in Boise in the late 1960s. He said that base “was the top of the line.” When the Forest Service closed the Boise base in January 1979, Montoya got divorced on the same day.
- 365 Since Montoya has returned to visiting the smokejumpers, he has attended many reunions and meetings. He explained why he goes to these gatherings and what things smokejumpers talk about during these reunions.
- 400 When Montoya attended these reunions, he returned to his primary smokejumper role, which, for him, was teaching the job to the “neds.”
- 410 **END OF SIDE ONE**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Allen, Max
Atlanta, Idaho
Beck, Mike
Boise, Idaho
Cromwell, Leo
Donnelly, Bob
Gila National Forest (New Mexico)
Harden, Harvey
Idaho City, Idaho
Island Park, Idaho
Knapp, Skip
McCall, Idaho
Ortiz, Benny
Peterson, John
Ramsey, Stan
Salyer, Ken “Moose”
Smith, Ken
Stover, James “Smoky”
Tate, Stan
United States Forest Service